



LOUISIANA
HEALTH EQUITY



LOUISIANA GUBERNATORIAL HEALTH FORUM

OCTOBER 9, 2023 | 6 P.M. CT.

*Dillard University
New Orleans, LA*

Gubernatorial Forum on Health, Equity, and Our Communities

In the 2023 Louisiana gubernatorial election, issues of health and equity are once again at the forefront, particularly when it comes to the health of women, children, and the communities that surround them. Louisiana's indices on health and equity remain near the bottom in the nation.

Medicaid, crucially expanded and extended further under the COVID pandemic, remains a lifeline for many, but not always providing the highest standards of care. The proposed sale of Blue Cross Blue Shield to Elevance, recently postponed, raises concerns about privatization and affordability of healthcare insurance and access to health care.

Even as an Office of Women's and Community Health has been instituted, the enactment of the abortion ban presents new risks to maternal health, maternal and child wellbeing, and the efficacy and stability of the health care system as a whole. Standards of treatment remain unclear in cases of miscarriage, fetal nonviability, and more. OB-GYNs, already short in Louisiana, are said to be pursuing training and residence elsewhere, and emergency room physicians—often the front line of maternal-fetal emergencies are also said to be reconsidering their options.

But health is not just about what happens in hospitals and medical centers. The surrounding environment has major effects. The threats of climate change and environmental degradation to air, water, and land disproportionately impact women, children, the disabled, and the elderly, particularly in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities.

Other issues, notably our criminal justice system, also impact health in disproportionate and unjust ways. Incarcerated women experience particular challenges. Incarceration of both women and men, also has negative health and mental health effects on the incarcerated, their families and children, and their communities. Poor mental health may be the cause of crime or its effect, but it is certainly poorly addressed in Louisiana.

This Gubernatorial Forum, sponsored by the Louisiana Center for Health Equity, the Rotary Club of New Orleans, the League of Women Voters of Louisiana, Dillard University, and WBOK will focus on issues of health, equity, and communities that are crucial for Louisiana's progress and Louisiana's future. Topics to be pursued may include but are not limited to the following.

TOPICS

- **MEDICAID**—Since April of this year, half a million people in 11 states have lost Medicaid coverage due to disenrollment with the unwinding of a policy that allowed them to remain on coverage through the pandemic. The disenrolled have been reported to include 125,000 people in Louisiana, including 40,000 children.

Backgrounder:

<https://lailluminator.com/briefs/children-medicaid>

- **OWHCH SUPPORT**—An Office of Women’s Health and Community Health was recently established in Louisiana after many years of advocacy and effort, to address the situation of women’s health in Louisiana, which has consistently ranked among the worst in the nation. But the OWHCH has faced problems of inaction and low funding, among other issues.

Backgrounder:

<https://thecurrentla.com/2023/a-new-office-aims-to-improve-louisianas-womens-health-outcomes-it-s-been-a-difficult-birth>

- **MATERNAL HEALTH**—A recent “60 Minutes” report revealed that Louisiana is one of the riskiest states in which to give birth, and that women in the U.S. are twice as likely to die in childbirth as their mothers were a generation ago. Disparities in maternal health outcomes disproportionately affect women of color, particularly Black women, in Louisiana.

Backgrounder:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/women-in-louisiana-fight-to-get-maternal-health-care-60-minutes-transcript>

https://www.nola.com/news/womans-hospital-opening-inpatient-mental-health-unit/article_2cb3bc0e-00ee-5a92-901f-4df808d5423e.html

- **ABORTION BAN EFFECTS**—The same “60 Minutes” episode also discussed the unintended consequences that the abortion is having on medical care, including effects on the willingness of doctors to train and practice in Louisiana, including emergency room physicians, pediatric cardiology specialists, and others on the front line of insuring maternal and child survival and providing care to women and girls who are the victims of sexual traumas, like rape and incest.

Backgrounder:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/doctors-detail-unintended-consequences-of-louisiana-abortion-ban-60-minutes>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/08/18/1111344810/abortion-ban-states-social-safety-net-health-outcomes>

- **ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS**—The EPA recently halted a civil rights investigation into whether the state of Louisiana put Black residents of the notorious “Cancer Alley” at a higher risk of cancer despite an initial finding of racial discrimination. In recent years and recent weeks, the state’s population has faces threats from a heat wave and drought that spread, along with fires, throughout the state. Saltwater intrusion expanding up the Mississippi River has threatened the water supplies—and even the aging pipes of the water delivery infrastructure in New Orleans and other cities. And we should note on this Columbus Day holiday, which is now recognized more and more as Indigenous Peoples Day, that our Native Louisiana communities are some of the most threatened, with some from the Isle de Jean Charles having been designated the nation’s first “climate change refugees.

Backgrounder:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/epa-drops-environmental-justice-investigations-in-louisiana>

<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/people-isle-jean-charles-are-louisianas-first-climate-refugees-they-wont-be-last>

- **MENTAL HEALTH & VIOLENCE**—A recent Tulane survey showed that more than half of Louisianans have experienced violence, and one in five have been threatened with a gun. The violence is often caused by the perpetrators' own poor mental health and responses to violence they have experienced. And the prevalence and threat of violence affects the mental health of Louisiana population as a whole. The mental health of Louisiana's youth has been a particular concern, especially those in the juvenile justice system.

Backgrounder:

<https://news.tulane.edu/pr/new-tulane-survey-offers-first-full-snapshot-violence-prevalence-across-louisiana>

https://www.lahealthequity.org/_files/ugd/c4a00d_722cfb5870e54ed18f638db0699df792.pdf

- **ECONOMIC HEALTH**—Last month the U.S. Census Bureau released data showing that the nation's poverty rate, particularly the poverty rate for children had increased from 5.2% in 2021 to 12.4% in 2022. According to these figures about 765,000 of Louisiana's 4.6 million residents lived in poverty by the end of 2022, an increase of 44% from 2021. The trend is now away from the progress of the past couple of years and is headed backward toward pre-pandemic levels. The reversion is largely attributed to the expiration of federal pandemic programs that offered many Louisianans a tantalizing glimpse at a better and more secure life.

Backgrounder:

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/politics/child-tax-credit-caused-higher-inflation-leads-poverty/article_dd96a89d-ee4c-5677-bdca-8356097f7042.html

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/12/business/economy/income-poverty-health-insurance.html>

- **HEALTH CARE INEQUITIES**—Louisiana sits at the bottom of most health care measures, despite considerable expenditures on health care and these health care expenditures constituting nearly half the most recent state budget. Unequal outcomes disproportionately affect people of color, particularly Black Louisianans. Metrics on children's health are particularly bleak.

Backgrounder:

https://www.nola.com/news/healthcare_hospitals/why-is-louisiana-unhealthy-new-state-database-aims-to-connect-environment-behavior-to-health/article_b1f23bc2-98af-11eb-89f2-bb28d7ecc22b.html